INTERMOUNTAIN STATION
Central Reference File
E23

Research Note

NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN
FOREST AND RANGE EXPERIMENT STATION

No. 59 January 1948 Missoula, Montana

Christmas Tree Shipments Drop 24 Percent

By

M. B. Dickerman

Montana shipped 2½ million Christmas trees in 1947. This is about 800,000 trees, or 24 percent, less than were moved out of Montana in 1946 (Table 1). The nearest comparable year in shipments was 1942 when, due to labor and freight car shortages, only 2,200,000 trees were reported.

Missoula was the only major producing county in western Montana which increased shipments. In eight counties decreases ranged from -6 to -61 percent. In Flathead and Lincoln Counties, which supplied 83 percent of all trees moving out of Montana, cutting was down 15 and 25 percent, respectively. For the first time in recent years cutting in Flathead County exceeded, although by only a small margin, that in Lincoln County.

Table 1.

Comparison of Number of Christmas Trees Shipped - 1946-1947

Montana

County	1946	1947	Percent of change 1946 to 1947
	--Number of trees--		
Lincoln	1,368,400	1,032,000	-24.6
Flathead	1,224,000	1,046,250	-14.5
Lake	246,000	110,000	-55.3
Sanders	131,800	51,000	-61.3
Missoula	127,000	143,350	+12.9
Granite	62,500	41,750	-33.2
Ravalli	61,000	57,500	- 5.7
Mineral	60,000	24,000	-60.0
Powell	15,800	6,300	-60.1
Other 1/	2,900	3,490	+20.3
Total	3,299,400	2,515,640	-23.7

1/ Includes Deerlodge, Gallatin, Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, Madison, Meagher, Silver Bow and Teton Counties.

The sharp decline in Christmas tree shipments in 1947 is attributable to two factors: The discoloration and defoliation of many of the Douglas-fir trees in the Rocky Mountain area and a shortage of personnel to administer public sales.

The discoloration and defoliation of so many of the trees has been attributed to a number of causes. Infestations of Cooley's louse were identified in some areas and may have been a factor. A needle blight fungus has been identified too and may have been the major cause. Other possibilities may be unseasonal frosts, damp weather, hail, and snow 1/. In addition it is reported that some of the trees were cut prior to a heavy frost. This may explain, in part at least, why some of the early shipments deteriorated. Whatever the cause, or causes, the resultant effect on sales of Christmas trees is clearly evident at this time. Whether or not the tree supply will be affected in subsequent years is not known and probably will not be until the causal agency is determined.

The second major factor which resulted in the curtailment of the Christmas tree industry in western Montana in 1947 was the shortage of timber sale personnel, especially on national forests. The greatly expanded sales of timber required the attention of the forest staffs, thereby limiting the time they could spend on administering Christmas tree sales. Reports indicate that numerous prospective buyers of trees were turned away frequently because of the lack of administrative personnel.

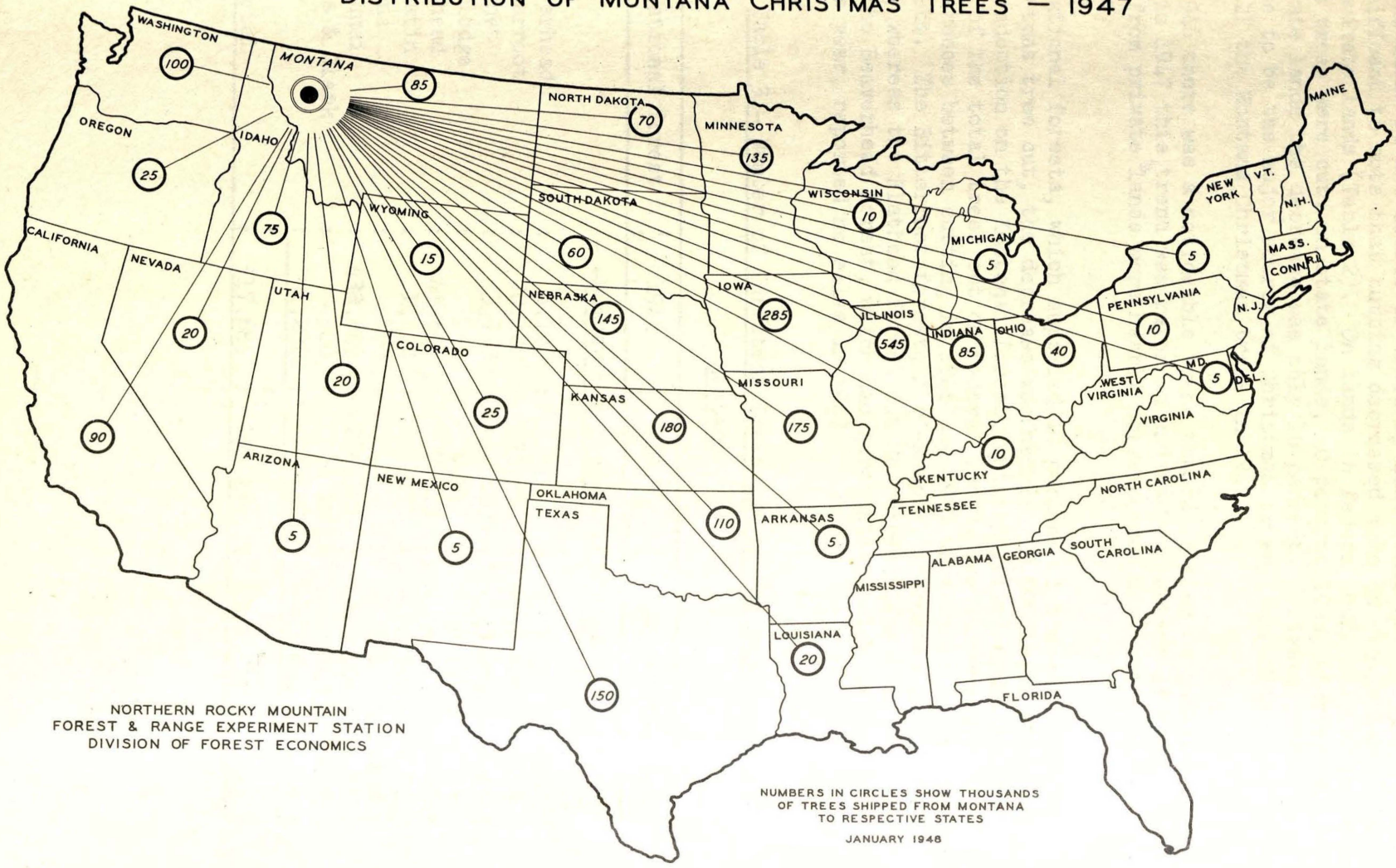
Table 2 - Cut of Christmas Trees by Land Ownership Groups

Ownership Group	Number of trees cut				Decrease	
	1946		1947		1946 - 1947	
	Thousands	Percent	Thousands	Percent	Thousands	Percent
Private	2501	75.8	2099	83.4	- 402	-16.1
Federal	518	15.7	250	10.0	- 268	-51.7
State	280	8.5	167	6.6	- 113	-40.4
All	3299	100.0	2516	100.0	- 783	-23.7

Montana trees were distributed to thirty-one different states (Diagram 1). Rail shipments were routed as far east as New York, south to Texas and west to California. More states received Montana trees this year than in any previous year, although the total quantity shipped was less.

1/ For a discussion of these factors see Management Practices for Christmas Tree Production, Northern Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Station Paper No. 9, issued November 1947.

DISTRIBUTION OF MONTANA CHRISTMAS TREES — 1947



NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN
FOREST & RANGE EXPERIMENT STATION
DIVISION OF FOREST ECONOMICS

NUMBERS IN CIRCLES SHOW THOUSANDS
OF TREES SHIPPED FROM MONTANA
TO RESPECTIVE STATES

JANUARY 1948

On the basis of the source of trees by land ownership groups it is significant to note that cutting decreased more on public lands than on private lands (Table 2). On lands in federal ownership 52 percent less trees were cut, on state lands, 40 percent less, whereas on private lands the decrease was only 16 percent. Private lands continue to be the major source of Christmas trees, supplying 83 percent of all the Montana Christmas trees in 1947.

In 1946 there was a noticeable trend toward cutting on public lands, but in 1947 this trend was reversed and the percentage of trees coming from private lands more nearly corresponded with the prewar years.

On national forests, which supplied 10 percent of the annual Montana Christmas tree cut, the decrease was nearly 268,000 trees (Table 3). The reduction on the Kootenai forest, which supplied about 86 percent of the total trees cut on federal lands, was 51 percent. Wide differences between cutting in 1946 and 1947 were reported by other forests. The Bitterroot forest, for example, increased sales 7 percent, whereas the Flathead forest cut 84 percent less than in 1946, and the Beaverhead forest, which had substantial sales in the previous year, reported no sales in 1947.

Table 3 - Number of Christmas Trees Cut on National Forests

Montana

National forest	1946	1947	Change from 1946	
	Number of trees		Number	Percent
Beaverhead	6,190	-	- 6,190	-100.0
Bitterroot	20,126	21,554	+ 1,428	+ 7.1
Cabinet	3,773	689	- 3,084	- 81.7
Deerlodge	-	4,998	+ 4,998	-
Flathead	45,645	7,475	- 38,170	- 83.6
Gallatin	1,418	390	- 1,028	- 72.5
Helena	100	-	- 100	-100.0
Kootenai	438,849	214,363	-224,486	- 51.2
Lewis & Clark	300	40	- 260	- 86.7
Lolo	1,284	650	- 634	- 49.4
Total	517,685	250,159	-267,526	- 51.7

The proportion of shipments by railroad and truck was about the same as in 1946 (Table 4).

Table 4 - Christmas Tree Shipments by Railroad and Truck - 1947

County	Rail shipments 1/	Truck shipments	Total shipments
		Number of trees	
Lincoln	980,000	52,000	1,032,000
Flathead	915,000	131,250	1,046,250
Lake	105,000	5,000	110,000
Sanders	45,000	6,000	51,000
Missoula	95,000	48,350	143,350
Granite	35,000	6,750	41,750
Ravalli	35,000	22,500	57,500
Mineral	-	24,000	24,000
Powell	-	6,300	6,300
Other	-	3,490	3,490
Total	2,210,000	305,640	2,515,640
Percent of total-			
1947	87.9	12.1	100.0
1946	86.9	13.1	100.0

1/ Data from reports by three railroads: Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific.